

which he describes in enthusiastic terms the prosperity and progress of his time (end of the second century). He did not perceive that society was in a conjuncture of decline. Many, however, from the time of Augustus saw evil coming. The splendours of the empire did not delude them. Tacitus feared evil from the Germans ; others from the Parthians.¹ The population of the Roman empire felt its inferiority to its ancestors. One thing after another gave way. Nothing could serve as a fulcrum for resisting decline, or producing recovery. In such a period despair wins control. The philosophy is pessimistic. The world is supposed to be coming to an end. Life is not valued. Ascetic practices fall in with the prevailing temper. Martyrdom has no great terrors; such as it has can be overcome by a little enthusiasm. Inroads of barbarians only add a little to the other woes, or hasten an end which is inevitable and is expected with resignation. At such a time a religion of demonism, other-worldliness, resignation, retirement from the world, and renunciation appeals both to those who want a dream of escape and to those who despair. Our own time, on the other hand, is one of advance on account of great unoccupied territories now opened at little or no cost to those who have nothing. Such a period is one of hope, power, and gain for the masses. Optimism is the philosophy. All the mores get their spirit from it. " Progress " is an object of faith. A philosophy of resignation and renunciation is unpopular. There is nothing which we cannot do, and will not do, if we choose. No mistake will cost much. It can be easily rectified. In the Renaissance in Italy, besides the rejection of religion and the disorder of the state, there was a great

movement of new
power derived from the knowledge which was
changing the life
conditions. Great social forces were set loose. Men of
heroic di-
mensions, both in good and ill, appeared in great
numbers. They
had astounding ability to accomplish achievements,
and appeared
to be possessed by devils, so superhuman was
their energy in
vice and crime as well as in war, art, discovery,
and literature.
No doubt this phenomenon of heroic men
belongs to an age
of advance with a great upbursting of new power
under more

¹ Boissier, *Relig. Rom.* ^ I, 239.